

**MANY VOICES GENERATED FROM DIFFERENT POSITIONS  
MAKES FOR A BOISTEROUS SELF: A COMMENTARY ON  
STEMPLEWSKA-ŻAKOWICZ, WALECKA AND GABIŃSKA**

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**ABSTRACT.** Stemplewska-Żakowicz, Walecka and Gabińska describe a novel empirical examination of one of the basic premises of Dialogical Self theory; namely, whether different I-positions produce different self-narratives. Their analysis led them to discover several interesting findings, some of which stem directly from dialogical self theory and some of which are more surprising. Stemplewska-Żakowicz and colleagues' article therefore calls attention to several important distinctions between I-positions, including the distinction between explicit versus implicit positioning, as well as comparisons among I-positions, including distinguishable differences in the content as well as the formal characteristics of the self-narratives generated by different I-positions. The authors should be commended for embarking on the challenging empirical journey into the dialogical self.

Stemplewska-Żakowicz, Walecka and Gabińska present a fascinating empirical approach to the examination of the dialogical self. As they point out, although much theoretical work has been generated on the dialogical self, little work exists that has systematically tested the central ideas put forth by the theory. We therefore applaud the authors not only for embarking on this challenging empirical journey, but also for persevering in their analysis despite both the intimidating number of variables observed (115 variables!), and the complexity of their findings. Their analysis uncovered several remarkable and thought-provoking findings, some of which follow directly from dialogical self theory and some of which would have been very difficult to predict in advance.

Stemplewska-Żakowicz et al.'s distinction between explicit and implicit positioning is an interesting and, to our knowledge, as yet unexplored avenue in dialogical science. The distinction between explicit and implicit processes is commonly found in mainstream psychology. Much current research in social psychology, for example, concerns itself with the distinction between the more conscious versus non-conscious processes of evaluating oneself (e.g., explicit versus implicit self-esteem) as well as of evaluating others (e.g., explicit versus implicit attitudes; see, for example, Fazio & Olson, 2003). In the current work, comparing the results of the explicit I-posi-

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tions (i.e., those attained through the addressing positioning) to those of the implicit I-positions (i.e., those attained through the imaginative and verbal positioning), led the authors to uncover many intriguing findings. For example, while feelings of guilt as well as concerns about moral issues were seen in the life stories of participants asked to explicitly address their Mother, feelings of anger as well as the need for destruction and fight surfaced in the stories of participants for whom Mother was only implicitly activated. This finding suggests that whereas talking on the phone with one's mother may summon an I-position that is dutiful and responsible, later indirect reminders of one's mother (e.g., a teapot received as a gift from one's mother) may encourage a more belligerent and defiant I-position. To some extent, the explicit position resembles a straightforward self-presentation phenomenon, but the cognitive dynamics of the implicit position are less clear and require further study. Is the individual here more able to experience self as separate from the other person, which allows for reactions against the pressures the other represents? It would be useful to examine differences between these positions when the individual is not explicitly reporting a self-narrative, an exercise that arguably emphasizes issues of individuality and autonomy.

Also very interesting are Stemplewska-Żakowicz et al.'s findings concerning the comparisons across I-positions. That different I-positions should produce different life stories is perhaps not overly surprising in and of itself, particularly given that the authors themselves acknowledge James', and others', idea of the existence of many relational selves within every individual. There is much current research in mainstream social psychology on this notion of relational selves (see, for example, Andersen & Chen, 2002; Baldwin, 2005). Particularly interesting is the finding that the stories formed under different I-positions also differed in their formal characteristics. It would have been difficult to predict, for example, that the differences between the stories produced by the Mother's Child I-position and the Father's Child I-position would be so vast: These two Child I-positions evidently differed not only in their general verbal productivity, but also in their expressed emotions and story endings, with the Mother's Child I-position being generally more positive and optimistic than the Father's Child I-position. Indeed, the authors draw attention to the fact that for most of both the formal- and content-related characteristics, the two Child I-positions could be placed at opposite poles of a continuum, with the three remaining I-positions falling somewhere in between these two. The authors' hypothesis that one's parents' opposite subjective worlds are the extremes in between which all other relational realities may be found is provocative and fascinating. Future research could examine individual differences in implicit and explicit I-positions, relating to both mother and father, and attempt to relate these to other personality factors of interest.

In the study conducted by Stemplewska-Żakowicz et al., each participant was primed with only one I-position. It seems logical to presume, however, that in everyday experiences people might be simultaneously primed with multiple I-positions. For

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example, a high school student may find himself not only addressing his teacher (summoning his Pupil I-position) and fellow students (some of whom would likely summon his Friend I-position), but also his girlfriend (summoning his Partner I-position), siblings (summoning his Brother I-position), and even implicitly his mother who packed his lunch for him that morning (summoning his Mother's Child I-position). Effectively managing the sheer number of all of these voices, let alone their often competing characteristics (e.g., talkative Mother's Child vs. quiet Pupil) would seem like a highly daunting task, however the majority of people seem to navigate through their multi-voiced lives with comparative ease. Presumably, individuals are able to move easily among their many voices and adopt the one that is most appropriate for the current task at hand or else adopt a compromise position that integrates two or more positions. Future studies might be considered to empirically examine this apparent fluidity among voices by, for example, priming multiple positions simultaneously and observing not only the resulting life story and how it is written, but also the participants' facial expressions of affect (see, for example, Andersen, Reznik, & Manzella, 1996) and their expectations concerning social interactions with others (see, for example, Ayduk, Downey, Testa, Yen, & Shoda, 1999; Baldwin, Fehr, Keedian, Seidel, & Thomson, 1993).

Overall, Stemplewska-Żakowicz et al. have taken an important step in furthering the empirical examination of the dialogical self. Consequently, they have also called attention to several important distinctions between, as well as comparisons among, I-positions. Although dialogical science is still a relatively young field and many studies remain to be done, future research by dialogical scientists may benefit from the empirical road that now stands partially paved.

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